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Secrets

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Of the 1,400 or so Marines who guard the 134 U.S. embassies around the world, it's both pleasant and comforting to believe that most while away the boring hours thinking warm thoughts about country, honor and duty. It's uncomfortable to suspect that 10% of them, if the Marines at the Moscow embassy are a representative sample, devote their equally boring hours to nagging thoughts of sex, money, strong drink and the availability or lack thereof.

Cynics, of course, will claim that any young Marine in his early to mid-20s will spend close to 100% of his time thinking about sex, especially if he's in a foreign country where he's forbidden to fraternize with local women.

Such a non-fraternization order was promulgated in Germany just after World War II. It was quickly rescinded when realists recognized that to enforce it at least half the army of occupation would have to be court-martialed.

It was shortly after that, in 1947, when

Ross Thomas' new novel, "Out on the Rim," will be published in the fall by Mysterious Press.

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the federal government, in one of its periodic fits of economy, decided to use Marines to guard U.S. embassies. Before 1947, embassy security had been handled by civilian personnel. Just why the Marines were chosen over the Army or Navy to serve as the State Department's rent-a-cops is vague. But a good guess would be the Marines' resplendent dress uniform. Who would choose olive drab or navy blue if a dash of Ruritania were available?

I first became acquainted with embassy-type Marines more than 25 years ago in Germany where I was loosely attached to the U.S. Embassy in Bonn. The embassy Marines there were a disciplined but cheerfully cynical bunch of hard cases, keenly aware of their soft berths and equally aware that they were, by God, U.S. Marines. They were also dedicated gossips.

There was the usual social pecking order at the embassy. At the bottom were German civilian employees. The Marines were a notch higher and just above were American clerk-typists and code clerks. There was, however, a 3-1 ratio of women to men in Bonn then and the Marines cut a wide romantic swath through the embassy's younger female personnel without any noticeable regard for grade, rank or nationality. It was, one of them told me, all part of the duty.

Bonn was then and still is a nest of spies. But it's difficult to imagine the KGB baiting a honey trap for a Bonn embassy Marine with one of its swallows—even one as lovely as the gray-eyed Violetta Seina who allegedly led Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree astray in Moscow. In Bonn, the *femme fatale* was a surplus commodity.

It's possible that an agent of another foreign power might have tried to subvert

the well-fed, well-housed Marines with bribes. The Marines were chronically broke despite the small fiddles they had going on the side.

But I suspect that if an Uncle Sasha had approached them with a bribe, they would have reported it immediately or, depending upon how impoverished they were, taken his money, broken his arm and tossed him into the Rhine to see if he could swim. They were, as I mentioned, a hard lot.

But what may have once worked fairly well in Bonn obviously cannot work in Moscow today. Some people now suggest that only married Marines be posted to Moscow, along with their wives. Faced with cramped housing, cultural isolation and the rigid Foreign Service caste system, I suspect that this would only lead to an increased Marine divorce rate.

Another suggestion is to farm embassy security out to private enterprise. But the cost of staffing all East Bloc U.S. embassies with competent personnel would be staggering—unless the security firms shipped over the same geezers they use to patrol warehouses here in the States.

So if the Marines, single or married, are to be phased out, and if private security firms prove too costly, why not post neophyte male and female agents of the Central Intelligence Agency, interns really, to rattle the doorknobs at various U.S. embassies east of the Elbe? What with having attended some of the same schools as the Foreign Service officers, and being from approximately the same social strata, the CIA fledglings could probably avoid ostracism.

They could also learn a new language and familiarize themselves with a new country. They could even practice their spying—nothing heavy, of course, but merely some low-level stuff to find out if they had the knack.

The brightest of the apprentices would be assigned to the most oppressive regimes: Bulgaria, Romania and Czechoslovakia. It would be valuable on-the-job training while they earned their keep by making sure the file cabinets were all

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locked, the documents all shredded, the wastebaskets all emptied and that no mysterious strangers were roaming the embassy corridors at night.

While this might solve the human security problems, the technical problems would remain formidable, especially in Moscow where both the old embassy building and the new \$191-million one that's still abuilding are said to be nothing more than enormous electronic eavesdropping devices.

Rep. Daniel A. Mica (D-Fla.), seemingly overcome by gloom, claims the United States has in Moscow "a brand-new facility that you cannot move into and an embassy you cannot whisper in."

Obviously, the CIA has tried to do to the Soviets just what they have done to the United States. In a long, long game of tit-for-tat, they have bugged our embassy in Moscow and we have bugged the late Leonid I. Brezhnev's favorite limousine, plus the Washington residences of several high Soviet embassy officials.

In one bugged residence, an ex-CIA

operative confessed last week, the electronic snooping provided the CIA with more than it wanted to know about the methods of toilet-training for Russian infants. And as far as sex is concerned, if the KGB seduces our Marines, the CIA has provided female companions for high-ranking Soviet defectors. The services and charms of one such companion were said to have cost the U.S. government roughly \$60,000 a year.

So while blame for this security catastrophe is being parceled out, the Soviets snicker and make wisecracks about reds being on top of the Moscow embassy beds rather than under them. And no one seems to have any idea of what to do about it all.

There does, however, seem to be one obvious if temporary solution to the problem of the Moscow embassy's electric typewriters, reportedly infested with virtually ineradicable electronic bugs that are marvels of engineering.

The solution, of course, is to scrap all the electric typewriters and bring back old upright mechanical Remingtons and Underwoods. Too bad the rest of the security mess can't be cleaned up as easily. □